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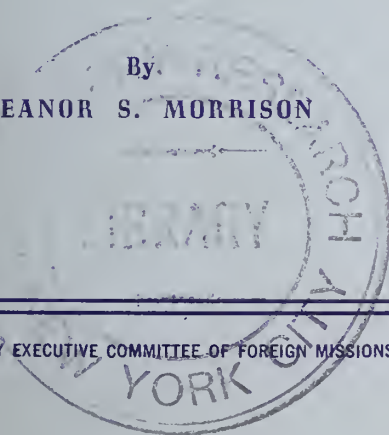
Morrison

A CHANCE FOR CONGO WOMANHOOD

By
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A Chance For Congo Womanhood

By Eleanor S. Morrison *

Not for women! The strongly imbedded idea, not only among the native men but among the women as well, was that this religion which brought so much blessing was indeed a very wonderful thing **for the men** but not for the women! This was what the pioneer missionaries in Africa found to be a general idea.

A woman, what was she? A mere beast of burden, a possession to be bought and sold. A woman's life was to be lived at the will of her husband or male relatives. Had she a soul? Well, had a goat or a sheep or a bag of salt a soul? A soul to be saved? Why talk of the soul of a woman? Was she better than such chattel?

As a general rule while the men of the Congo have been responsive to the teachings of the missionary, the same has not been as encouragingly true of the women. Indeed, until recent years it has been an up-hill job to bring Congo women to the foot of the cross. Untold patience and grace has been required to overcome the many obstacles in winning the Congo people from such a conception of their womanhood, and even today there are many discouragements in establishing Congo women in the faith.

Boys and men might eagerly flock to our schools and to hear the teachings of our evangelists, but girls and women had no time for such things. Their duty was to work in the fields, gather the wood and bring the water, beat the flour for the bread, cook the greens, and care for the children. Woman's life was the life of a slave, the kind of life expected of one who has no mind or soul. It soon became evident that there would be little hope of reaching Congo's womanhood unless some way could be found to demonstrate their value and to prove to women themselves, as well as to men, woman's worth.

For it was an axiom of our first missionaries that in order to establish a Church of Christ in the Congo there must be Christian homes, and in order to establish Christian homes there must be Christian mothers as well as Christian fathers in these homes.

Some means had to be found to lift some of the young girls from their tawdry native life, to isolate them to some degree at least

*Eleanor S. Morrison and her husband, Rev. T. K. Morrison, were with their two children passengers on the ill-fated steamer "Zamzam." They were rescued and returned to this country, Mr. Morrison subsequently resuming the trip to the Congo where he is now at their station, Luebo.

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from an environment that refused to acknowledge them as human beings, and to provide for them an atmosphere and opportunity that would bring them to recognize for themselves something of their own mental and spiritual worth. The answer to the problem seemed to be the establishing of what was called Girls' Homes, where the young girls could come and live for a greater part of each year in a Christian atmosphere and under the supervision of a missionary with the further opportunity of attending classes in school.

The first such Home was established on Luebo Station by Miss Maria Fearing, our early Negro missionary, and soon came to be known as the Pantops Home for Girls, a name familiar throughout the churches in America. The value of such a Home became so evident that as each of the following Stations of our Mission were opened one of the first institutions established at each place was a Girls' Home. And now scattered across our territory in the heart of the Congo, and glowing as great beacon lights from which thousands of Christian Congo women as candles have caught their glow, are the five Girls' Homes of our Congo Mission. Each Home performs an indispensable service in the opening up of the hearts of the women to the Gospel. Each Home is now adequately housed by the generous gift of the Woman's Auxiliary Birthday Offering of 1930, and more recently a further Birthday Offering has provided the funds for their support.

Candlelights

Let us consider some of the candlelights who have gone out from those Homes into the darkness.* There are thousands of them. We missionaries come upon them in most unusual and unexpected places. Sometimes it is a candle which caught its glow at the first beacon light in Luebo years and years ago and is still burning brightly. Such earnestness puts to shame many of us who should carry a much brighter flame. Sometimes it is just a tiny flickering light all but extinguished by the mass of heathenism and superstitious customs heaped upon it. But a light it is nevertheless. And one loves to think of many unknown candles lighted through the years, weak though their flames may be, but burning.

Tshibuabua

One of the brightest lights I have ever known burned in the heart of Tshibuabua. She was reared in one of our Homes and married one of our evangelists. She and her husband were sent to a village

*See for reference "God's Candlelights," by Shaw (Edinburgh House Press).

far out in the "hill country" among people of a tribe different from their own, there to witness to Jesus Christ and Him crucified. How beautifully and faithfully Tshibuabua bore that witness is told by one of our missionary ladies who kept in touch with her during those trying years.

The first scene is a sad one. Tshibuabua lies weak and spent on her little mat in the native hut that is her home. The missionary must stoop to enter, and entering finds Tshibuabua's mother with her daughter. The younger woman has just given birth to a baby who never breathed. Of course one would think the mother would bring courage and comfort to the daughter in her sorrow. But alas! Instead of giving courage and comfort, this mother is heaping blame and reproach upon Tshibuabua, with a vituperation that only a heathen Congo woman can muster. Gathered outside the hut are others who have come to taunt her and accuse her of having killed her baby, for had she not steadfastly refused the "care" of the midwives whom her mother had called in? Useless to try to tell them that had Tshibuabua submitted herself to their treatment, not only would the baby be dead, but her own chances of living would have been practically nil. Tshibuabua lay too weak to argue with them, with tears flowing down her cheeks for her lost baby.

She turns to her mother and says, "I am a child of God and cannot take part in these heathen practices, for no longer do I have faith in them. My faith is in our Heavenly Father and I have just given back to Him the little baby He gave to me."

The scene changes. Two years have passed, but the chief actors are the same. The missionary coming from an early visit to the hospital on our mission compound meets Tshibuabua and her husband coming slowly down the path. Tshibuabua is again to give birth, and the mission doctor has told her to come to him and he will try to save her baby. Behind Tshibuabua comes her mother, still skeptical and as ever skilled in the art of vituperation, surrounded and encouraged this time by a company of friends and relatives. The baby is born, a lovely baby boy, and Tshibuabua and her husband go away not only filled with joy at having the baby, but with a feeling that now their faith has triumphed and they can more effectively teach the people of the village to believe in their God who has given them such a lovely baby in the place of the one they had lost.

But how short lived is their joy and hope, for the baby is taken ill and again they come to the hospital. Again the missionary stands behind Tshibuabua. The doctor has just gone, for there is nothing

more he can do for them. The little thing is dying, and there are so many other patients who need him. The heathen mother of Tshibuabua is still there, berating more than before.

Again tears flow down Tshibuabua's cheeks, but she patiently says to her mother, "My Mother, you gave me to the Mission Home for training when I was a little girl, and there I came to know Jesus our Saviour and God our Father. I cannot now put that teaching out of my heart, for it is now that I need it most." And Tshibuabua and her husband take up the body of their precious baby and carry it to its burial, refusing to the end to have the native mourning that accompanies heathen funerals.

Another year has passed and the scene again lies far out in the little village where Tshibuabua and her husband have worked so long and so faithfully and so hopefully. The missionary approaches the village and a crowd comes out to greet her. And leading that crowd, well out in the front, comes, not Tshibuabua, but Tshibuabua's mother! One expects to hear the curses of this woman, but is amazed to hear praises, not curses, praises for the teaching concerning Christ that our Mission had given her daughter. She tells the missionary of Tshibuabua's courage and faith and of the great peace that had come to support that young woman in her deep sorrows, and how this had shown that Tshibuabua had dwelling in her heart a spirit surpassing all spirits she had ever known. For it was a spirit of love and peace and comfort, and not an evil spirit come to bring sorrow. Not only so, she continued, but she and many of the other women of the village had now entered a class taught by Tshibuabua and they wanted to come to know Tshibuabua's God.

Tshibuabua again appears, but this time not with tears. There is a wistfulness in her sweet smile when she says, "And now I know why God took my babies."

Would your candle or mine burn with such earnestness through such storms as those? And is the oil we pour into those beacon lights that set on fire such hearts as Tshibuabua's, too dearly bought with our money? We must never let that supply run low.

Malendola

We should probably find her beating rice, for it is her particular tribe that knows best how to grow rice and beat it to a shining whiteness and yet leave the grains whole. But she would lay down her stick and come eagerly to greet us with a smile worth walking three miles through sand and under a boiling hot sun to see. And you would not find in her the usual embarrassment and hesitancy to talk that one so often finds in Congo women. For this woman,

Malendola, has long been associated with the missionaries, and she loves to sit and talk of days she spent in the Home. There her candle was lighted many years ago.

I well remember the visit I had with Malendola when she told me her life story. We sat together, I on a little three-legged stool and she on a mat just outside the door of her little home.

"Ah, Mama," she said, "I well remember being brought into the Home here when I was just a tiny girl, and the years I spent under the teaching of Miss Fearing were happy years for me. I remember, too, her 'rod of correction' for she had to use it often, but always when she punished us it was with love and we knew that she did it to teach us to walk in the right path. As I grew up in the Home I became a Christian, and when I was old enough I married a boy of our own tribe who had also been reared in the mission and was an evangelist. We were very happy in our work, and I was very proud when Dr. Morrison called me in to help with the translation of the Word of God into our own language.

"Then one day my husband and I were called in to find another missionary representing another group who had come out to preach the Gospel and who had decided to go back with this teaching to the Batatela people from whence we had come. He wanted us to go with him and help begin that work! Our hearts rejoiced at the thought of going back to our very own people, our own relatives, with this precious Word of Life that would free them from their slavery to customs and superstitions. Here was the greatest joy we had ever known!

"So we went with this new missionary with tears of sorrow at leaving so many friends and fellow workers at Luebo and the missionaries there whom we had come to know and love, but with our hearts light with joy and courage in knowing that we would be serving our Master in serving our own tribesmen." And so Malendola carried on with a faith that not only sustained her through the years, but that has been the strength of her husband as well. It was her candle that helped to light the darkness of the Batatela people among whom the Methodists have established such a great and effective work.

Mbomba

Sit beside me on our little front veranda as I await Mbomba's coming to tell me goodbye as she, a teacher, starts back with her husband to her village far out in the hills. Here she comes up the path, and I think I have never seen a lovelier smile on the face of a

Christian than the smile that lights up Mbomba's face. One sees shining there the hope, the joy, the faith of one who knows her Lord. And yet how nearly Mbomba came to losing all opportunity to attain that peace and hope and joy and faith!

A few short years ago I sat one night writing letters home when there was a knock at my door, or rather a clearing of the throat, for that is the way the Congo native usually announces to you his presence. I went to the door and found standing there on the threshold a little girl. Frightened she held closely the hand of a young man whom she remarkably resembled. This was her brother, and he told me he wanted to put her in our Home there at Luebo. He handed me a little note from the evangelist who was located in the village from which they came. The evangelist wrote that the young man was already a baptized Christian and that he wanted to save the little girl.

"Mama," the young man said to me, "this little girl is my sister and wants to be a Christian. I have been teaching her myself. But I am the only member of my family who is Christian and now they are trying to take this child away. Our older sister for several years has been living in sin down at Leopoldville and has come home for a visit. She has many silks and beads and even shoes to wear. And she has brought money to my father and brothers, and that of course has made them happy. And now this older sister wants to go back to Leopoldville and wants to take with her this little girl to become a woman of sin and bring even more money to our family, and of course my father and brothers are anxious to have her go. I cannot stop them, for I am only one and am the youngest boy of the family at that. But you could keep her in your Home and they would not dare to steal her from you, and the state official will not make you give her up to them, for she does not want to go. I beg you, Mama, to take this child and protect her."

I turned to the little girl whose big eyes were darkened by fear. The oil for our beacon light was very low. Could we possibly manage to stretch it enough to light one more little candle for Christ? But how could I send this child away to almost certain spiritual hopelessness and death? How could I take from her the last little hope she had of a happy, carefree childhood and an opportunity to know our Lord? No, I couldn't do that. The Church at home wouldn't want me to. The oil **must** be stretched enough to meet this need. And so I called the faithful old matron of the Home, Baba Tshiala, and put little Mbomba in her care. The brother thanked me and went away feeling that his little sister was in safe hands.

Mbomba was not always good, no, not by any means, but she was almost always smiling! She developed rapidly and among the girls proved to be an outstanding student. It was a very happy day for me when one of the fine young teachers came to ask for Mbomba in marriage, and he offered a dowry that pleased even the heathen relatives. Today she sheds her light in the village where her husband teaches, and has established there a truly Christian home.

She has been here in Luebo for the past two weeks, and now comes to say goodbye. We shall have a prayer together asking God to bless and keep her in His service, and to bless and keep the home that she and her husband have established. And we shall pray that in her turn she may be the source of light for other little girls who walk in darkness, and that she may lighten up with her glowing candlelight the paths they tread.

Madilu

Some years ago one of the missionaries was visiting in a village and made friends with a woman who was the mother of four little children. This mother was not strong and soon sickened and died, leaving a request that the missionary would see that the children were brought up in the Christian faith. It was a large request, but the missionary as best she could sought to comply.

The youngest child was a mere baby and was daily brought by his older sister to the missionary's home for milk. This older sister, Madilu, though a mere child herself, was mother to the three younger ones. But as the three girls grew older it became more and more difficult to give them proper supervision, for in the teen age of course their greatest temptations came. So one by one as they reached the age limit for our youngest children we took them into the Home until we had all three. Caring for the little boy who now was old enough to go to school was not such a problem. Madilu continued to be the "Mother" and always was one upon whom we could depend for help.

As she grew older we began to worry a bit that she was not asked for in marriage, for though a girl may not want to accept marriage early, she begins to get restless and becomes something of a problem when she sees her friends leaving the Home to marry. But Madilu was never a problem. Finally she was asked for by an older man, but she did not think it a good marriage and refused. She was supported in her refusal by the missionaries, although it might prove her last chance and the man was a Christian in good standing.

Then much to our joy she was asked for in marriage by one of the outstanding boys in the Boys' Home on the Station who was planning to go to the Bible School at Mutoto. And now a letter comes telling us that Madilu is a leader among the women there in the Bible School, and is proving as faithful and helpful as she did as a girl in our Home. What possibilities lie in this fine young woman whose experience as mother to her younger brother and sisters and whose training, first by the missionary who cared for all the children when they were small, and then in the Home, has peculiarly fitted her for an evangelist's wife. Let us pour out our prayers for her that her light may indeed shine in the dark spots to which she and her husband may go.

Masenga

The little Ford pick-up truck is surrounded by a swelling crowd. The day is sultry and depressing. The missionary and his wife are leaving the village now for their home in the Station, and the crowd has come to say goodbye. Then, too, an added reason for the crowd is the little white baby, for few natives of that section have ever seen a white child before; there has been a constant stream of curious onlookers coming in to see him. The two missionaries themselves are tired and frankly discouraged, for the trip has lasted for more than three weeks and it is their first experiment in itinerating with the baby! And here, too, in this last village they have found many problems. The native evangelist has not proved faithful to his trust, and has to be eliminated. The missionaries turn their minds and hearts to welcome thoughts of going home, back to the clean little house that is home and more,—a little brick house with cement floors that is a stronghold against heathenism and a retreat for spiritual and physical refreshment when the pressure of a heathen world becomes too burdensome. The car is loaded and the mother and baby inside, and the father is shaking hands in farewell, when a delegation of three young men comes running up, breathless from running.

"We want a word with you, sir," they address the missionary. "We have come in great haste, for we did not know until yesterday that you were here near us. We are only a day away by foot travel and we beg you to come over to our village, for there are many there who are believers and want to be baptized."

The missionary consults his little map of that particular territory on which are indicated all the villages that are occupied by our evangelists and he cannot find the village they have named as theirs.

"Oh no, sir," they continue, "the name of our village is not on your list. Several years ago the evangelist who had come to teach us fell into sin and was taken away and you had no other to send us. But Masenga is there and she has kept the Christian work going. And now others are ready to be baptized and she has sent us to beg you to come with your session and examine and baptize those who are ready."

The missionary husband and wife exchange glances but not words, for words are not necessary. Visions of home for that day vanish, and the Ford truck, with one of the three young men perched on top of all the baggage as a guide, is turned into the path. They are off to the village where Masenga has kept a light burning. Another night, it will mean, in a native hut, and although the native who turns over his little home to them welcomes them warmly, there is some protest in the night from the chickens, the dog and the goats, who less readily give up their sleeping places!

As they reach the village Masenga comes out to greet them. And who is she? Another candle that caught its glow from Miss Fearing's Beacon Light. She tells of how after many years in the Home, she was then prevented from returning after a vacation with her people, but rather was sold in marriage to a man who was not a Christian. But before long an evangelist came to their village, and now Masenga who could read and write helped the evangelist and his wife with their work. Masenga prayed for her husband to become a Christian, and the evangelist prayed and labored too. Finally the prayers were answered and her husband became a Christian. They had several children and all were baptized in infancy and were taught the Christian faith. But Masenga's husband died, and then her family wanted to send her into another marriage. But she was an older woman, and with the help of the evangelist she persuaded her family to leave her alone. Then for years there was no evangelist, and Masenga herself carried on the work alone. It was she who held together the little band of Christians, and who also brought others into the catechism classes, teaching and preparing them for their examination for baptism.

Now she brings forward her little group and they are examined for baptism by the visitors. Ten new members are added to the Christian group of the village. And new hope and courage come into the hearts of the missionary and his wife who from the other village had turned homeward discouraged. If God had raised up Masenga to take over this work in this village, might He not also have some one prepared to carry on in the other village which had

lost its evangelist? If this one woman could do so much in this village, what might not be accomplished by the hundreds of others who had attended our Homes and were now scattered throughout the territory as wives and mothers? Again the Ford turns homeward, but it carries hearts that are full of joy, warmed and given courage by Masenga's glowing candlelight.

Konkalonka

And now another light. It is one that I thought had been extinguished, yet it was found several years later to be burning. A little girl had been brought to our Home by her father who had promised that we might keep her there until she was old enough to marry, and that she might then marry a Christian. After a few short years when little Konkalonka was still too young to marry, the father came back to claim her. When I protested and reminded him of his promise that we might keep the child and later arrange a Christian marriage for her, he was obdurate.

"Yes, truly I did promise that," he said, "but you see, now I have a debt and I must have the money and the goats which this girl will bring; I have arranged a good marriage for her; she is to marry a wealthy chief of our tribe."

When I inquired as to the age of this chief and as to how many wives he already had, I found he was an old man and already had eleven wives! But still, the father thought, it was a good marriage, for it would bring him much wealth.

I appealed to the little girl herself to stay with us, for the State Government would support her refusal on the grounds of a child marriage if she would determine to refuse to go with her father and into such an arrangement; if, however, the child herself consented, then we would have no hold on her.

Well, whether she had been threatened with the visitation of evil spirits if she refused, or whether she, too, had come to think that this marriage would be a good one, I do not know. I only know that she turned her back upon all our teaching, acknowledging in no way the love and care that we had bestowed upon her, and chose to go with her father. And so I stood and saw crushed in the dust at my feet the hope which I had cherished for a Christian woman, and for another Christian home.

Some few years later we were making an itinerary again to some of our outstations. We were ready for the closing service at which there were to be baptized several adults and babies. We were also to have a communion service for all the Christians in nearby villages who were to gather in this village for the one big service, for

we had not been able to visit all the villages where we had believers. Imagine my surprise when this same girl came walking in with a baby in her arms, and beside her a young man who was her husband. He too was a Christian and stood up with her for the baptizing of the baby. When the service was over she came to me and I asked her how it had happened that she had not married the old chief.

"Well, Mama," she said, "when we got back to our village after leaving the Home we found the old chief very ill, and he died before my father could collect the dowry. Afterwards I begged my father to let me marry this young Christian man who came to the village looking for a wife. He did not have as much dowry to give for me as the chief had had, but my father then needed the money badly, so he let me marry this young man, and now this is our second baby we have had baptized."

It is true, of course, that had not the first temptation been removed by the death of the old chief, this child might not have remained a Christian and certainly would not have had a Christian marriage. Perhaps, too, it would have made a happier story to tell had she refused the chief's offer. But does God never have to remove temptation from us lest we fall? Have we **always** been strong enough to resist the temptations that have come our way? Anyway there was still a light shining here, with a Christian home established and blessed with two children. How many other such lights there are of which we missionaries know nothing! Surely God must look down from His vantage point and see many more perhaps than we dream!

Their Chance!

Yes, there in the Congo stand these Beacon Lights. And there in the Congo come streaming in to them from every section of the country hundreds of girls who have no other hope in their lives for the light of Christ. But back in those far away villages in other parts of the Congo there live thousands of girls who cannot come to these pleasant Homes, and who may never know that Light except through the girls who do come into the Homes and who return to their own people as lighted candles to light those the less fortunate who could not come.

Shall you and I not give in generous measure that precious oil represented by money, love, hope and prayers, pouring it into those Beacons and into other lamps that they may never flicker nor burn low, indeed until they all glow with such brilliance that they are seen and felt in uttermost parts of this heathen world, until a candle is lighted that will burn for Christ in the heart of every Congo woman and in the heart of every needy woman and girl everywhere?